

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 IO-13

OMB-01 RSR-01 /098 W

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R 310525Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1600

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, AS

SUBJ: STAGE SET FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT BUT

EARLY ACTION UNLIKELY

REF: CANBERRA 4653

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: STAGE HAS BEEN SET FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT WITH SENATE REJECTION OF ELECTORAL BILL FOR SECOND TIME ON AUG 29. HOWEVER, VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS VIEW OF POLITICAL OBSERVERS IS THAT PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM, WHO HAS SO FAR DECLINED COMMENT, WILL NOT ASK FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION AT THIS TIME. SEEMS LIKELY PM WILL WAIT FOR RESULTS OF PARAMATTA BY-ELECTION IN NSW SEPT 22 BEFORE DECIDING COURSE OF ACTION. MEANWHILE MORGAN GALLUP POLL MADE PUBLIC AUG 30 SUGGESTS GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE LOST GENERAL ELECTIONS, HAD THEY BEEN HELD FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST. END SUMMARY.

2. STAGE WAS LEGALLY AND PROCEDURALLY SET FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATE ON AUG 29, WHEN SENATE, BY VOTE OF 28 TO 22, REJECTED FOR SECOND

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TIME COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL BILL. SEEMS LIKELY, IN PRESENT MOOD

OF SENATE, THAT SERIES OF OTHER BILLS GOVERNMENT REGARDS AS VERY IMPORTANT WILL ALSO BE REJECTED FOR SECOND TIME. UNDER AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM IS NOW IN POSITION TO GO TO GOVERNOR-GENERAL AT ALMOST ANY TIME TO ASK FOR AND TO OBTAIN DOUBLE DISSOLUTION. VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS VIEW OF POLITICAL OBSERVERS IS THAT HE WILL NOT RPT NOT ASK FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION AT THIS TIME.

3. PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF HAS REFUSED TO COMMENT ON SENATE ACTION. IN ANSWER TO QUESTION IN SENATE AUG 30 SENATOR MURPHY (GOVERNMENT LEADER IN UPPER HOUSE) SAID QTE PRIME MINISTER AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE WHATEVER ACTION IS IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA END QTE. THIS IS PRO FORMA RESPONSE WHICH COULD MEAN ANYTHING.

4. APPEARS LIKELY THAT GOVERNMENT WILL WAIT TO SEE RESULTS OF PARAMATTA BY-ELECTION IN SYDNEY METROPOLITAN AREA SEPT 22 BEFORE DECIDING ON ACTION. ALSO A FACTOR IN GOVERNMENT RETICENCE IS CONTINUED ADVERSE TREND IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS FROM GOVERNMENT POINT OF VIEW. MORGAN GALLUP POLL PUBLISHED IN BULLETIN ISSUE OF SEPT 1 (WHICH WAS ON NEWSSTANDS FROM AUG 30) STATES THAT ALP HAD SUPPORT OF 43 PERCENT OF PEOPLE, AS OF INTERVIEWS UNDERTAKEN AUG 4-11, COMPARED TO 49.6 PERCENT AT TIME OF ELECTIONS IN DECEMBER, 1972. MORGAN GALLUP POLL CONCLUDES LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES, WITH DLP SUPPORT, WOULD HAVE HAD 52 PERCENT OF VOTERS AND WOULD HAVE WON EASILY. OTHER POLLS HAVE SUGGESTED ALP IS STRONGER THAN MORGAN GALLUP POLL INDICATES, AND ALL POLLSTERS ADMIT POSSIBILITY OF THREE PERCENT ERROR IN CALCULATIONS, EITHER WAY. HOWEVER, ALP PROSPECTS AT PRESENT ARE NOT PARTICULARLY GOOD. MOREOVER, MORGAN GALLUP POLL TAKEN PRIOR TO INTRODUCTION OF BUDGET AUG 21, AND NEW POLL PRESENTLY UNDER WAY, TO BE PUBLISHED IN MID-SEPTEMBER, WILL REFLECT IMPRESSION BUDGET HAS MADE ON ELECTORS.

5. VOTE IN SENATE ON AUG 29 ON ELECTORAL BILL HAD BEEN POSTPONED ONE DAY AT REQUEST OF DLP, WHICH INDICATED IT WISHED TO CONSULT WITH ITS PARTY LEADER, SENATOR GAIR, WHO HAD BEEN SLIGHTLY INJURED IN FREAK ACCIDENT WITH LAWN MOWER IN BRISBANE AND DID NOT ATTEND SESSION. PRIOR TO VOTE ALP FIGURES FREELY PREDICTED, AS THEY HAVE FOR MONTHS, THAT DLP WAS LOSING ITS NERVE AND WOULD NOT DARE TO SET STAGE FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION, SINCE IT COULD LOSE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TWO OR THREE SENATE SEATS. HOWEVER, DLP VOTED SOLIDLY AGAINST ELECTORAL BILL WITH LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES.

6. COMMENTING ON VOTE LATER IN SESSION ON AUG 29, SENATOR MCMANUS, DEPUTY LEADER OF DLP, SAID IN HIS CUSTOMARY, STEELY TONES, QTE ANY TALK ABOUT A DOUBLE DISSOLUTION APPEALS TO MY SENSE OF HUMOR. IF THERE WERE A DOUBLE DISSOLUTION IN THE NEXT FORTNIGHT, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO GET CONTROL OF THE SENATE. NO

MATTER WHAT HAPPENS IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT, THE DLP WILL HAVE THE
BALANCE OF POWER IN THE SENATE. WE HAD THE BALANCE OF POWER WHEN
WE HAD ONLY TWO MEMBERS OF THIS CHAMBER, AND WE WILL HAVE THE
BALANCE OF POWER IRRESPECTIVE OF WHETHER WE HAVE TWO, THREE,
FOUR, OR FIVE MEMBERS IN THE NEXT SENATE. END QTE.
GREEN

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